4:Gough E-5 (1947-1949, 1952)1958 AWll Kerala AWll
Nayar

like the cult of lineage ghosts, are non-Sanskritic. I discuss the three categories of cults in that order, and then refer briefly to modern changes in the cults.

The Cult of Lineage Ghosts

Each traditional Nāyar house contains a room devoted to lineage ghosts. Within the shrine are placed small, low stools (*pīṭhams*). On each of these it is believed that a particular ghost comes to sit on the days when offerings are made.

In property groups of the aristocratic lineages of village headmen and district chiefs, which own more land than do commoner Nāyars, family histories recorded in palm leaf documents may contain the names and achievements of twenty or more *kāranavans* extending back over two or three hundred years. In such lineages, whose property groups divide less frequently than do those of commoner Nāyars, the *kāranavans'* spirits are housed in a special building in the courtyard south of the ancestral house. Commoner Nāyars care somewhat less for their ancestry. Sometimes they have only three or four stools for their lineage ghosts and remember by name only those who died within the last hundred years or whose lives were in some way remarkable. Remarkable *kāranavans* are those who fought bravely in battles or received honor from chief or king, those who earned property on behalf of their matrilineal groups, or those who died prematurely through accident, murder, epidemic or suicide.

Regular offerings are made only to *kāranavans*, for only *kāranavans* hold legal authority and only their names tend to appear in documents which survive for posterity. On the advice of the astrologer, however, a *taravād* may, in emergency, propitiate the ghost of an ancestress or of a man who died before becoming *kāranavan*. But such ghosts are always those who died within the lifetime of living members.

The lineage ghosts are regularly propitiated[5] on the new moon days of Karkidagam (July-August) and Tulām (October-November). Food is cooked in the kitchen by women of the matrilineal household, and a large portion is placed on a plantain leaf for each of the ghosts. It includes curried meat and vegetables, fried paddy, beaten rice, fuits, and sweet puddings of various kinds. Toddy and arrack were traditionally served along with the meal. If a dead *kāranavan* is known to have enjoyed special foods during life, he receives a large portion of these foods. Occasionally, even in the past, individual Nāyars have been vegetarians. The spirits of vegetarian *kāranavans* may not be served with meat and are housed in a separate shrine. When the dishes are prepared, they are carried quickly to the shrine so that the ghosts may partake of their essence before others have tasted or smelled them. The living *kāranavan* places the leaves before the stools in the presence of men junior to him in the property group and then closes the door of the shrine. Age-rank is observed in making the offerings. For each spirit, in addition to its own leaf, is briefly offered the food later placed before the stools of spirits junior to it. Similarly, the vegetables of vegetarian ghosts are first offered to meat eaters who were senior to them, and the vegetables (but not the meat) cooked for meat eating ghosts are first offered to vegetarian ghosts who were their seniors. After a few minutes the *kāranavan* reopens the door and distributes the food, to be eaten by all members of the *taravād*. Women take no part in offering the food and may not enter the ancestral shrine on this day. They are also forbidden to enter it during menstrual and birth pollutions, and all members are forbidden entry during the fifteen days of pollution following a death.

Traditionally, at the close of offerings to the ghosts, men of the *taravād* might